

FACT SHEET

05/99

The Border Patrol

The U.S. Border Patrol, the uniformed law enforcement arm of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), was officially established on May 28, 1924 by an act of Congress passed in response to increasing illegal immigration. The initial force of 450 officers was given the responsibility of combating illegal entries and the growing business of alien smuggling.

While the Border Patrol has changed dramatically since its inception 75 years ago, its primary mission remains unchanged—to detect and prevent the unlawful entry of aliens into the United States and to apprehend those persons found in the United States in violation of immigration laws. Together with other INS officers, the Border Patrol helps maintain borders that work—facilitating the flow of legal immigration and goods while preventing the illegal traffic of people and contraband.

To fulfill this mission, the Border Patrol uses a number of different techniques:

- **Linewatch** – One of the most important activities of a Border Patrol agent is linewatch. To prevent undocumented aliens from crossing the land border and to detect and apprehend those who enter the United States illegally, agents maintain surveillance using electronic sensors, infrared scopes and low light television systems. They are assisted by air surveillance.
- **Sign Cutting** – Sign cutting is similar to tracking. Agents search for and interpret disturbances in the natural terrain that indicate the presence or passage of people, animals, or vehicles.
- **Traffic Checkpoints** – Traffic checks are conducted on major highways leading away from the Southwest border to apprehend deportable aliens and to confiscate narcotics that evaded detection at the border.
- **Transportation Check** – Border Patrol Agents inspect the interiors of buses, commercial aircraft, passenger and freight trains, marine craft and other conveyances.
- **Marine Patrol** – Along the coastal waterways of the United States and Puerto Rico and waterways that are part of U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico, the Border Patrol employs a fleet of 55 vessels of various sizes to conduct border control activities.
- **Horse and Bike Patrol** – Horse units patrol remote areas along the international boundary with Mexico that are inaccessible to standard all-terrain vehicles. Bike patrols are used to support enforcement activities in urban areas.

- **Canine Program** – This program, implemented in 1986 in response to escalating alien and drug smuggling along the Mexican and Canadian borders, uses trained dogs to locate marijuana, heroin, cocaine and hidden persons.

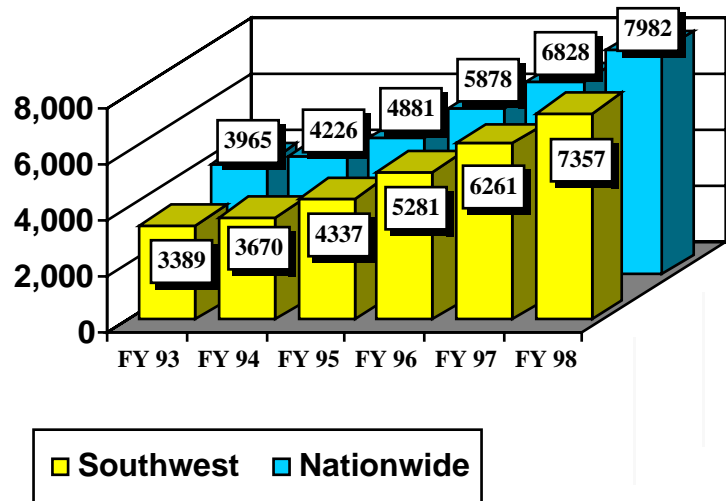
■ BORDER PATROL STAFFING

Since 1924, the Border Patrol has grown from a handful of mounted agents patrolling desolate areas along U.S. borders to today's dynamic work force of more than 8,000 men and women supported by sophisticated technology, vehicles, aircraft and other equipment.

To ensure that the increased staffing and other new resources provided by

Congress were deployed in the most effective and efficient manner possible, INS acted in early 1994 to develop and implement the agency's first comprehensive control strategy for the Southwest border.

Agents On Board by Fiscal Year

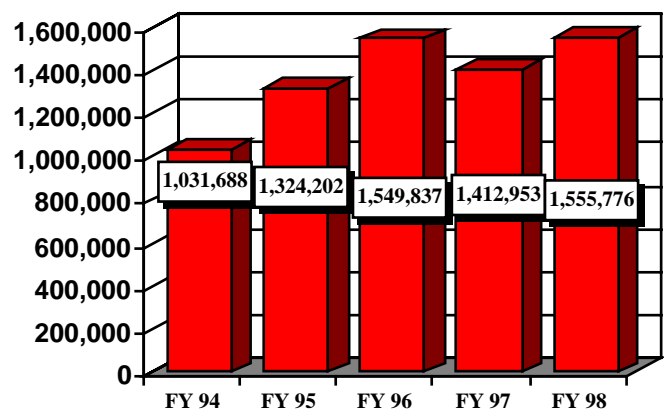


■ BORDER PATROL APPREHENSIONS

Last year, Border Patrol agents apprehended more than 1.5 million persons for illegally entering the country.

INS has achieved considerable success in restoring integrity and safety to the Southwest border by implementing the border-control strategy through a series of well-laid-out multi-year operations in major illegal alien trafficking corridors. These include Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, Operation Hold the Line in El Paso, Operation Rio Grande in Laredo and Operation Safeguard in Tucson.

Apprehensions by Fiscal Year



The initial phases of these operations typically result in an increase in apprehensions, reflecting the deployment of more agents and enhanced technology. However, the

number of apprehensions tends to decline as the operation takes root and gains control over the targeted area. For example, as recently as FY 1993, San Diego was the busiest corridor for illegal immigration, accounting for nearly a quarter of all apprehensions nationwide. In FY 1998, apprehensions there reached an 18-year low.

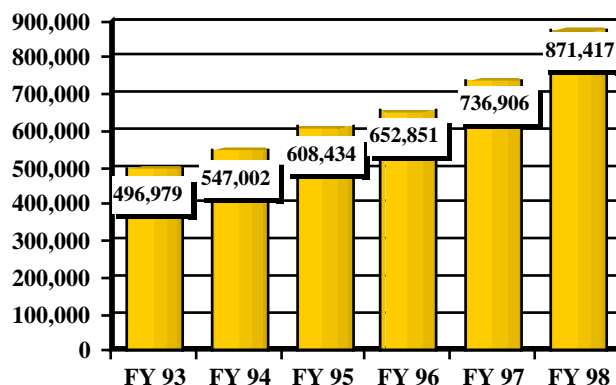
■ DRUG SEIZURES

An increase in smuggling activities has pushed the Border Patrol to the front line of the U.S. war on drugs, and its role as the primary drug-interdicting organization along the Southwest border continues to expand.

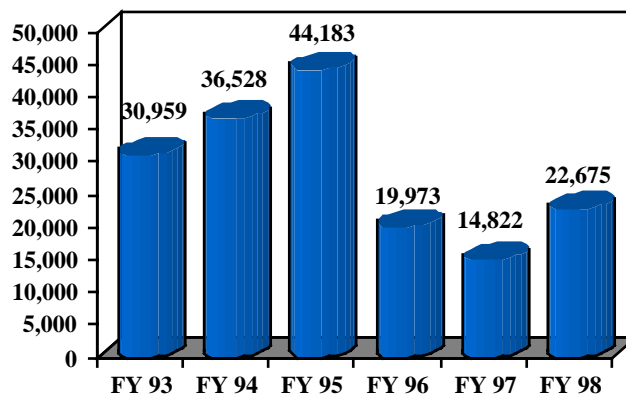
INS' heightened presence along the Southwest border has thwarted narcotics traffickers, as well as alien smugglers.

In FY 1998, Border Patrol agents seized record amounts of drugs, including 22,675 pounds of cocaine, an increase of 53 percent over FY 1997, and 871,417 pounds of marijuana, 18 percent more than in the previous year. The total street value of the drugs interdicted in FY 1998 was more than \$1.3 billion.

Marijuana Seizures by Fiscal Year
(in pounds)



Cocaine Seizures by Fiscal Year
(in pounds)



■ BORDER SAFETY

The Border Patrol's mission is to protect the nation's borders, and this includes protecting lives. Each year, the Border Patrol rescues hundreds of people put in harm's way by unscrupulous alien smugglers. As the Border Patrol's mission has grown, so have the risks that agents face. Their increased effectiveness in preventing and deterring illegal activity along the border has made them the obvious targets for frustrated criminals. In its 75-year history, the Border Patrol has seen 85 agents killed in the line of duty—16 in the past five years.

To make the border safer for officers, migrants and border residents, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner announced the agency's first Border Safety Initiative on June 16, 1998.

A vital part of the Border Patrol's work is educating the public about the risks and dangers associated with illegal crossings, including the fact that alien smugglers are criminals who have no regard for the lives of their human cargo, and assisting those who do not heed these warnings. The Border Safety Initiative is comprised of three elements:

- **Prevention** – Working with Mexican officials to identify dangerous crossing points along the entire Southwest border, discouraging illegal crossings and addressing safety problems.
- **Search and Rescue** – Targeting hazardous areas where migrants may become lost, abandoned or in distress due to the difficult terrain and the willingness of smugglers to lead them into dangerous territory.
- **Identification** – Establishing procedures and resources to help officials identify those who have died attempting to cross the border—a serious problem reflected by the fact that, in FY 1998, 40 percent of the 254 migrants who died were unidentified.

Recent examples of life-saving efforts rendered willingly and unselfishly by Border Patrol Agents include:

- **May 1999** – A group of illegal aliens was rescued from a locked train boxcar by El Centro Sector agents. The migrants were trapped without any food or water in a boxcar that was locked from the outside and required bolt cutters to open.
- **April 1999** – Agents from San Diego Sector worked around the clock to rescue 50 migrants stranded by a sudden snowstorm.
- **April 1999** – Agents in El Centro Sector rescued 10 migrants abandoned in the desert by their smuggler without food or water.
- **April 1999** – Eleven illegal immigrants were rescued from drowning by agents in Del Rio Sector.
- **March 1999** – An agent in McAllen Sector, who was conducting a routine train inspection with a specially trained dog, discovered eight dehydrated migrants buried in a hazardous material container.
- **February 1999** – Border Patrol Agents in El Paso Sector rescued 57 aliens who were left locked in an abandoned tractor-trailer.
- **January 1999** – Thirty-nine illegal immigrants, locked in a boxcar with no food or water, were rescued by Laredo Sector agents.

- **November 1998** – Two illegal aliens who were shot by their smuggler were found by agents in Tucson Sector and transported to a local hospital.

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